Writing Academically using the templates from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein (2017)

In their book, *They Say, I Say* (2010/2017), Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein encourage novice academic writers to make use of templates to frame their arguments. They argue that experienced academic writers make two central rhetorical “moves.” First, writers summarize what *others* have said (“they say”); then they pose their *own* argument in response to what others say (“I say”). Arguments either agree, agree with a difference, or disagree with other arguments. Also stressed in the book is the importance of acknowledging the other side of the argument (objectors or naysayers). In this handout, which reproduces some of Graff and Birkenstein’s templates, X, Y, and Z stand in for authors’ names. As you will see, their language is informal, specific, and personal, so we suggest you adapt their demonstrations of rhetorical moves to suit your purpose.

Describing an article or book you’ve read (introducing what “they say”)
- A number of ____ have recently suggested that _____.
- It has become common today to dismiss ________.
- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of _____ for ________.

Introducing standard views
- The standard way of thinking about topic X has it that______.
- It is often said that ________________.
- Many people assume that ________________________.

Introducing an ongoing debate
- In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been ____. On the one hand, ____ argues ____________. On the other hand, ______ contends _____. Others even maintain ________________. My own view is ________.

Using verbs that capture authorial action
- X acknowledges / argues / believes/ denies / does not deny / claims / complains / concedes / demonstrates / emphasizes / insists / observes / reminds us / suggests that

Introducing quotations
- X states, “__________.”
- As the prominent philosopher X puts it, “__________."
- According to X, “__________.”
- In her book, ____________, X maintains that “__________.”
- In X’s view, “__________.”
- X disagrees when he writes, “__________.”

The above templates are from or adapted from *They Say, I Say* by Graff and Birkenstein, 3rd edition, pp. 293-303, published 2017 by W.W. Norton Company, New York, New York. Reproduced/adapted by Madeline Walker, 2019, The CAC, University of Victoria. This copy is made solely for the use by a student, staff, or faculty member for private study. Any other use may be an Infringement of copyright if done without securing the permission of the copyright owner.
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Explaining quotations
- In other words, X believes ________.
- In making this comment, X urges us to ________________.
- X’s point is that ____________.
- The essence of X’s argument is that ________.

Signaling who is saying what
- X argues ____.
- According to both X and Y, _____.
- Politicians ____, X argues, should ________.
- My own view, however, is that ________.
- Indeed, it is highly likely that ________.

Disagreeing with reasons (“I say”)
- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks ____________.
- X’s claim that ________ rests upon the questionable assumption that ________.
- By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.

Agreeing with a difference (“I say”)
- I agree that _____ because my experience ____________ confirms it.
- X surely is right about ________ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _____.
- X’s theory of ____ is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of ________.

Agreeing and disagreeing simultaneously (“I say”)
- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that ____.
- Though I concede that ________, I still insist that ________________.
- X is right that _____, but she seems on more dubious ground when she claims that ________.

Acknowledging the naysayers
- Yet some readers may challenge the view that ____________.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that ________.

Describing why your research is important
- X matters / is important because _____.
- These finding have important consequences for the broader domain of ________.
- These conclusions / This discovery will have significant applications in ________ as well as ________.

For more information, see the book *They Say, I Say* available in the McPherson library on reserve and at the bookstore.